

# STOP SUMMER SLUMP

EXPERIENCE MOMENTUM  
DURING THE SUMMER

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# STOP THE SUMMER SLUMP

The Summer Slump. Every church leader knows exactly what those words mean. It means a drop in attendance, decreased participation, and reduced giving. According to statistics shared by Lifeway, when compared to highest attendance months, average Sunday morning attendance drops by 23 percent in June and 34 percent in July.<sup>1</sup>

This can be demoralizing to a church leader, as well as financial administrators, as the ministry attempts to make progress toward the vision with less people and money. If an unexpectedly deep summer slump is experienced, it can impact the church's ability to build momentum in the Fall as energy and funds are needed to replenish unplanned losses.

In a recent survey, we asked churches of all sizes and denominations how they handle the summer slump. The answers varied from "waving the white flag of surrender" to "taking out a loan" to "doing nothing"!

**"The biggest obstacle our church faces in the summer is a drop in giving and attendance. Ministry involvement outside of camps and VBS goes down too."**

**BEN - OKLAHOMA**

So, what is a church leader to do? Some leaders have taken a passive approach saying, “Let’s just see how it works out.” This has come with varying outcomes, but usually delivers less than desirable results. However, there is a way that could prove profitable. We’ll call it the “Proverbs 21:5 Road Map” – a guide to **Stop the Summer Slump**, or at least prevent summer slumps from zapping all of the momentum from your church.

*"The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty."*  
– *Proverbs 21:5*

In Proverbs 21:5, Solomon shares two potential outcomes: PROFIT or POVERTY. If given the choice, of course, we would all choose *profit over poverty*. In this verse, great wisdom is provided to show us how to produce profit. Solomon says it is important to have a **plan**. Read Proverbs 21:5 again. Do you see it? It is written that “*The **plans** of the diligent lead to profit ...*”

This is our first clue to Stop Summer Slumps: We must have a plan! Do you have a plan to address the summer slump at your church? If you do, fantastic! If you do not, this resource has been prepared to help you craft a great plan.

**"Our biggest obstacle is the financial slump. We need to be ahead of budget when we enter June to make our budget through the end of August."**  
**LONNY - TEXAS**

But, as we read Proverbs 21:5 again, we see that one more thing is necessary to achieve profit: diligence. “*The plans of the **diligent** lead to profit ...*” Even if we prepare a great plan, it will fall short if we don’t stick with its implementation.

The word “diligence” is defined as the “constant and earnest effort to accomplish what is undertaken; persistent exertion of body or mind.”<sup>2</sup> It is a fruit of the Spirit as well: self-control!

This summer, make it your goal to develop a **plan** to stop the slump, and implement systems so it will be followed with diligence.

If you do this, you will be well on your way to **profit** – positive momentum, increased attendance, giving, and engagement with ministry initiatives!

Throughout the development of this resource, we followed a few key guiding principles. First, we wanted to offer a framework that was easily understood. Then, we wanted to offer practical steps so you could implement them within your church. Thirdly, we sought real world examples so you could see how other churches have implemented some of the key steps to successfully overcome the summer slump.

Our hope and prayer is that your church will apply many of these suggested steps so you can experience momentum throughout the summer – in attendance, volunteer engagement, and giving.

# THE PLAN

CHALLENGE

ENGAGE

SEND

# CHALLENGE

## CHALLENGE THE PEOPLE

When is the last time you challenged your church as you headed into the summer? Something great happens when vision is shared and people are invited to help achieve it. As the great verse in Proverbs 29:18 (KJV) states: “Where there is no vision, the people perish ...”

Share a key part of the God-given vision, and challenge your church to achieve it this summer! Bill Hybels, Pastor of Willow Creek Community Church, has famously shared, “Vision is a picture of the future that creates passion in people.” As you issue a challenge to achieve a step toward the vision this summer, you will begin to see it create passion in your people. It will energize them and provide fuel for *engagement*.

**"Our church struggles during the summer with consistency; both fiscal, as well as physical presence. If a congregant isn't present, they are less likely to give."**

**LONNY - TEXAS**

Most summer slumps are accompanied by a decline in giving. One way to solve this problem is to issue a 90-Day Giving Challenge, ideally in May or June. Consider this thought for a moment: If you issue a 90-day giving challenge, it will span three months. If you issue the challenge in May, it will span the months of June, July, and August. These three months are the very ones that comprise the dreaded *summer slump*!

Let’s look at a typical church giving pattern for the year (Figure 1).

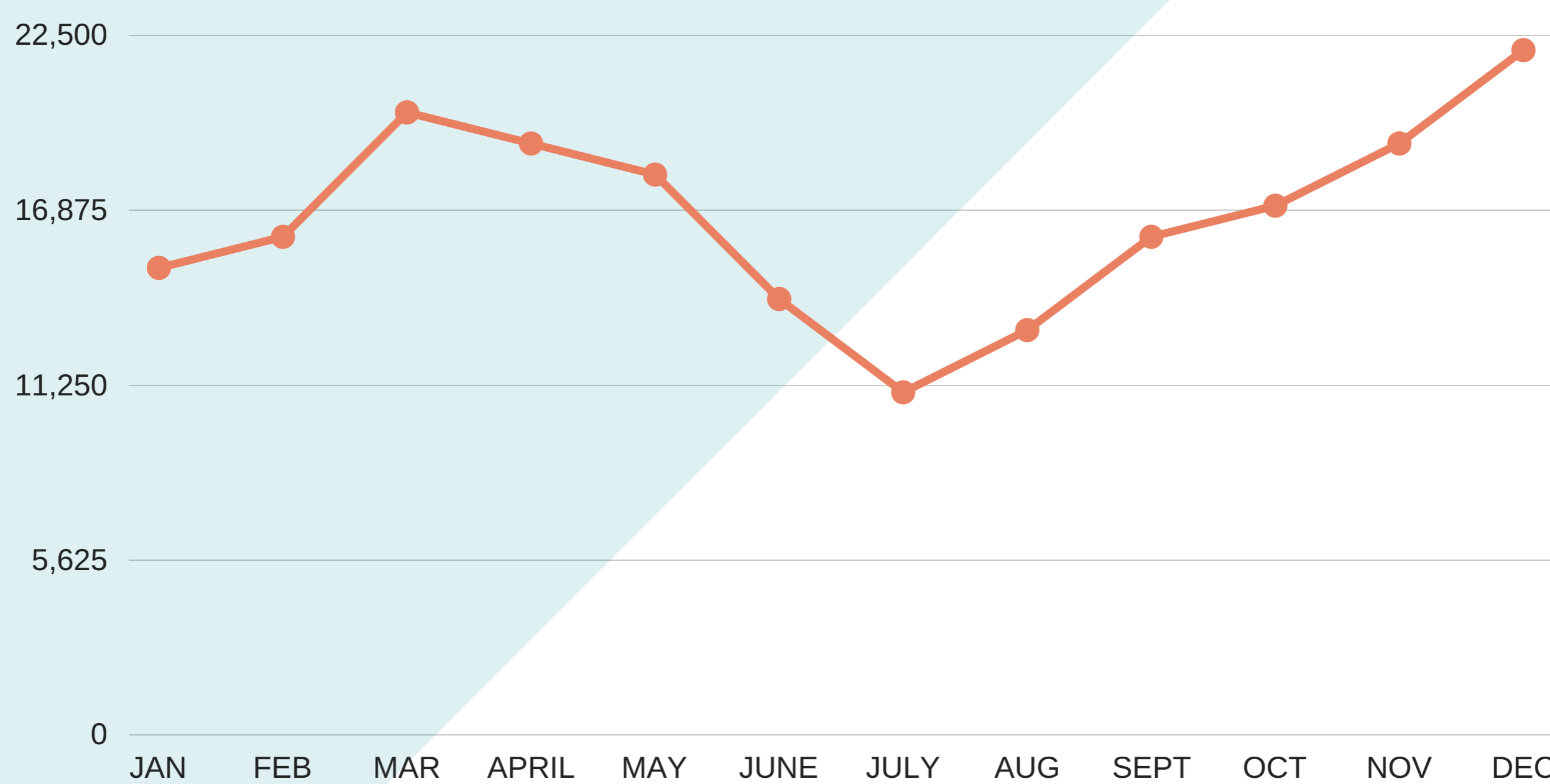


Figure 1. Regular Giving Pattern

Now let’s look at what would happen if the typical church issued a God-honoring 90-day giving challenge (Figure 2).

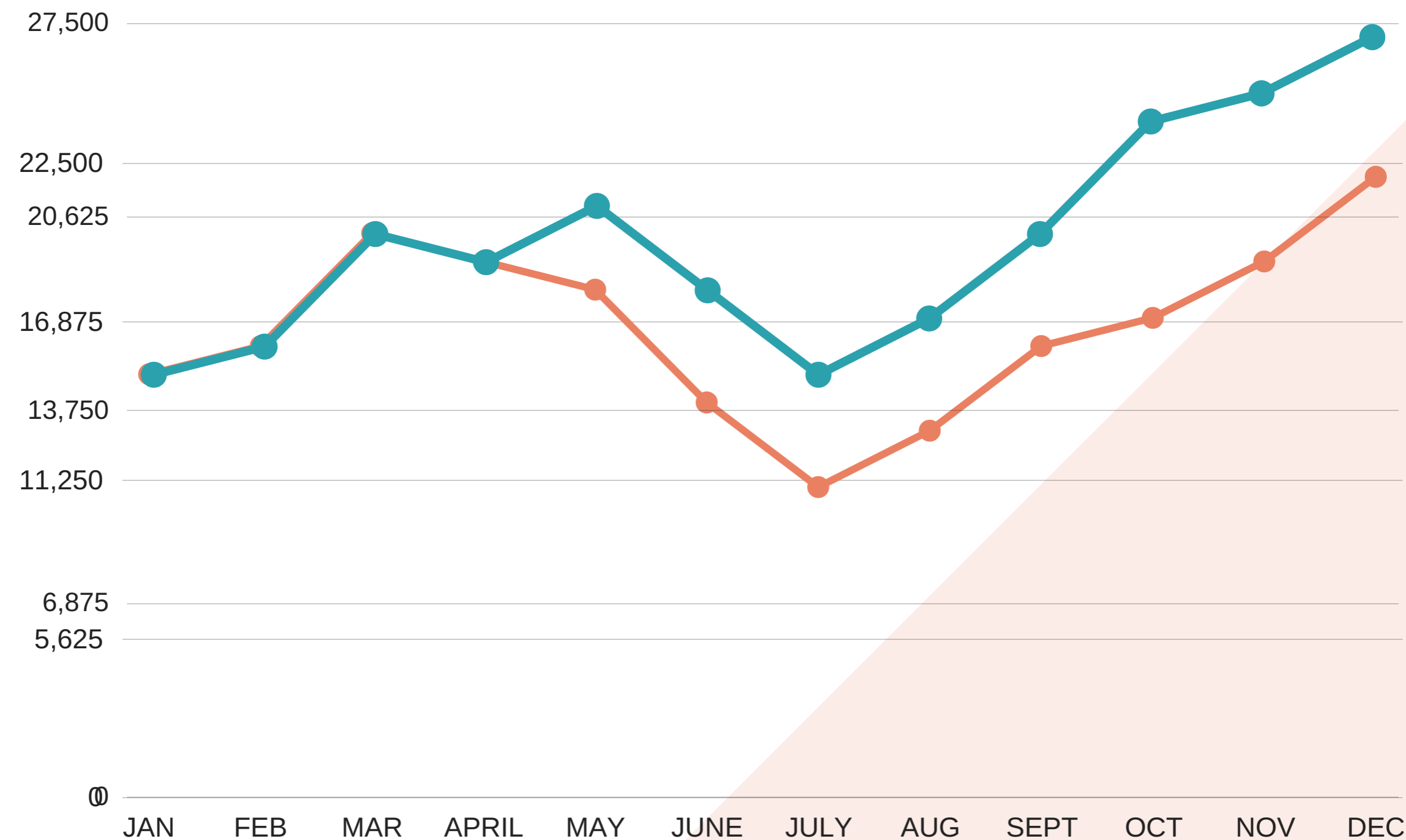


Figure 2. Regular Giving Pattern vs. Giving Challenge

**"Where there is no vision, the people perish..."**

**PROVERBS 29:18**

Do you see how this plan could help you **stop** the summer slump?

Many pastors don't like to talk about money. In fact, many have shared they hate to talk about money. This should not be the case. Money is an important part of our every day lives! To ignore it in the church is to allow the world to influence your congregation's view of money. Will that be a godly influence? Jesus referenced money or possessions in 17 of the 38 parables documented in the Gospels.

When people make a decision to begin giving to the Lord's work, they haven't just made a financial decision. They have also made a spiritual decision! They are trusting the Lord with money they could be using in so many different ways. Do you believe the Lord will honor their decision? Absolutely!

Perhaps one reason many church leaders don't want to talk about money is because they feel like they are asking for something from their people. Andy Stanley, Pastor of North Point Community Church, addressed this very feeling when he said, "When people are convinced you want something **FOR** them rather than something **FROM** them, they are less likely to be offended when you challenge them."

It is all about approach and motives. Will you challenge people to give solely because it helps you accomplish the vision? Or is it so people will honor the Lord with their wealth, and position themselves for blessings from Him?

We really want to help you experience a summer like never before, so we've included a step-by-step process for your church to issue a 90-Day Giving Challenge. Many churches we have worked with have followed this method to issue giving challenges, and they've experienced tremendous increases in giving. We pray it will have the same impact at your church!

**"When people make a decision to begin giving to the Lord's work, they haven't just made a financial decision. They have also made a spiritual decision!"**

Check out the guide below:

## **STEP ONE** *Weekend Message*

Deliver a weekend message about money and giving. Teach about the biblical basis for giving.

- Here are some great passages of Scripture to help you prepare your message: Malachi 3:10, Luke 6:38, II Corinthians 9:6-9, I Timothy 6:6-19, Luke 14:28-30, Matthew 25:14-30
- Deliver the message with a healthy dose of hope and encouragement. Condemnation rarely yields long-term results.

## **STEP TWO** *Issue 90-Day Giving Challenge*

At the end of your message on giving, challenge the people to respond by filling out a 90-Day Giving Challenge card.

- Card should contain four key pieces of information:
  - Name
  - Email Address
  - Two Response Options
    - I will continue to give to the Lord's work here at [INSERT CHURCH NAME]
    - I will commit to give to the Lord's work here at [INSERT CHURCH NAME] for the next 90 days
- Provide enough time for everyone to complete the card (~ 5 min.)
- Have the cards turned in at the end of the service as they leave
- See an example card in Figure 3 [page 13]

## **STEP THREE** *Provide personal finance solutions*

Many people want to give, but they are experiencing financial challenges, so they feel like they can't. It is important to disciple them to manage all of their finances (not just giving) in a way that honors God.

There are many good biblically-based personal finance small group materials available. Here are a couple of studies your church should consider:

### ***I Was Broke. Now I'm Not.***

- Six Session video-driven teaching with accompanying book and study guide
- Written and taught by Joseph Sangl
- Helps individuals live a *fully funded life* by climbing the “I Was Broke. Now I’m Not. Ladder”
- This study helps people implement foundational financial principles such as budgeting, giving, saving, debt elimination, insurance, investing, and endurance for an individual’s money journey
- Participant Kit: \$30.00

## ***Financial Peace University***

- Nine Session video-driven teaching with accompanying book and workbook
- Written and taught by Dave Ramsey
- Helps people navigate the "7 Baby Steps" to achieve *financial peace*
- This study focuses on financial principles such as cash-flow planning, saving, debt snowball, insurance and giving.
- Participant Kits: \$93.00

**"The biggest obstacle our church faces during the summer is people traveling and using their tithes on their travel."**

**MARTY - GEORGIA**

## **STEP FOUR** *Send 13 weekly discipleship emails*

By sending an email each week for 13 consecutive weeks, you will keep the challenge alive throughout the 90-day challenge period!

- Share key scriptures that encourage people in their giving, and help them grow in their knowledge of the Word.
- Invite people to share stories of how their faith is growing as they respond to the giving challenge.
- Share individual stories with everyone who is participating in the study. This will provide wonderful encouragement to all who are part of the challenge.
- Invite people to establish automatic recurring giving by providing a link for them to learn more and set it up. Automatic recurring givers are the most reliable!

## **STEP FIVE** *Share results and celebrate!*

Don't miss this very important part of the giving challenge. What is celebrated is replicated.

- Share the number of people who've accepted the challenge, because it will encourage everyone knowing they are not taking this journey alone.
- As you see giving increase beyond normal levels, provide updates to the entire church and say, "Thank you!"
- Once the giving challenge is completed, celebrate stories that have been shared of how God has intersected with people's lives as they put Him to the test.
- Encourage others in the church to take part at anytime.

**What is celebrated is  
replicated.**

# GIVING CHALLENGE CARD EXAMPLE

[CHURCH NAME / LOGO]

GIVING CHALLENGE  
I Am Taking The Challenge

Your Name \_\_\_\_\_

Your Address \_\_\_\_\_

City / State / Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Cell Phone \_\_\_\_\_

- I am a: ☐ Guest  
☐ Attender  
☐ Member

- ☐ I will continue to give to the Lord's work here at [Church Name]
- ☐ I will commit to give to the Lord's work here at [Church Name] for the next 90 days

Comments:

# ENGAGE

## ENGAGE THE PEOPLE

The main reason attendance wanes during the summer is because church leaders know many people will be gone, so they back off funding for vision-driven initiatives. They reason, “Spending on summer initiatives isn’t the best use of our giving dollars because of the summer slump.” In doing so, it creates a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Think about it for a minute. Failing to prepare for and fund summer initiatives ensures the summer slump *will* happen!

One way to reduce or eliminate the slump is to offer EPIC events throughout the summer. These are amazing moments that engage your people and compels them to stick around.

EPIC is an acrostic for:

EVERY  
PERSON  
IS  
COMING

An event becomes EPIC when it has the following two characteristics:

1. Vision-driven
2. Compelling

**"In the past we've tried to combat the summer slump by having more creative energy, attractive education, and worship series."**

**DON - PENNSYLVANIA**

### ***Vision-driven***

Don't create events just to fill a calendar. Create events that move people toward the vision God has given your church. If it is your church's vision to make "fully committed disciples," you could host a first annual "Discipleship Saturday" where you could train your congregation to become intentional disciple-makers.

### ***Compelling***

The word "compel" means to have a powerful and irresistible effect.<sup>3</sup> A truly compelling event will engage your people, pulling many people from the sidelines and into active ministry. One example of a compelling EPIC event is partnering with Feed My Starving Children to pack one million meals to serve the least of these around the world. Nappanee Missionary Church has partnered yearly with this organization to pack these meals, and it has mobilized more than 8,000 volunteers – from students to businesses to other churches!<sup>4</sup> Talk about compelling!

When you consider the summer, there are many vision-driven and compelling days that are naturally on the calendar for most churches.

Here are a few examples:

**Father's Day:** What could you do to engage fathers and their families to be a part of your Father's Day services?

**Youth Camps:** Your youth will probably be attending camp this summer. Perhaps your church could gather together to pray for the youth as they embark on what may be the most spiritually significant week of their year.

**Summer Kick-Off:** Instead of dreading the beginning of summer because of the expected slump in attendance and giving, why not celebrate the launch of this special season? After all, summer is a time of restoration and recreation for many people. It is when families embark on vacation adventures and make lifelong memories together. Relationships are rekindled as people venture out to the trails, lakes, cities, mountains, and beaches. Prepare a massive kick-off event to celebrate all the memories that are about to be made, to pray for safety in their travels, and to share and pray for the upcoming special EPIC events that will be taking place over the summer.

**Mission Trips:** These are what God created the Church to be – EPIC events to travel and share The Gospel with people all over the earth. As your church sends out groups to minister on mission trips, gather them together to pray and celebrate. As they return, provide an avenue for them to share what the Lord has done.

**One way to reduce or eliminate the slump is to offer EPIC events throughout the summer. These are amazing moments that engage your people and compels them to stick around.**

## ***Special Summer Series***

Summer is a great time to be able to have message series focused on spiritual growth for your congregation. You can focus messages that help people with apologetics – the defense of their faith. You can answer relevant and deeper faith questions such as “Are we living in the end times?” and about “Heaven. Hell. The Afterlife.” NewSpring Church in Anderson, SC began offering these types of series during the summer and saw the summer slump cut by more than half.

What are some messages, or series of messages, you’ve felt God preparing you to deliver? These messages could help your church grow deeper in their walk with the Lord, and their compelling nature will draw people to attend when they might otherwise have chosen to miss.

## ***Meet people where they are***

The Internet is incredible because it gives you the ability to carry your church’s messages around the world, *live*. Can your congregation join your live worship service even while they are traveling? Through the simple use of Facebook Live or other streaming services, your church’s message can be delivered to your congregation no matter where they are.

And that brings online digital giving into the equation. Can people give to your church online? Let’s ask the question more bluntly: Can people give to your church online, *easily* and in less than 90 seconds (preferably within 60 seconds)?

If people can join your worship service easily online and give through your church’s website or app, you *can* engage them throughout the summer. This will greatly reduce, or eliminate, the summer slump.

# SEND

## SEND THE PEOPLE

Summer is an incredible season to send people out into the community in impactful and meaningful ways. It allows them to put feet to their faith. There are several ways to launch your people into action. Here are a few ideas along with some real world examples.

### *Community Impact Events*

Many churches have embarked upon I ❤️ My City events. Element Church in Cheyenne, Wyoming has hosted I Heart WY events where they mobilized their church to prepare backpacks to give to schoolchildren and completed city beautification projects. NewSpring Church in Anderson, SC launched a #ForSC initiative to challenge their church to impact the entire state of South Carolina. Pastor Willard Maxwell at New Beech Grove Baptist Church in Newport News, Virginia, organized a basketball tournament to help bring reconciliation to their community.<sup>5</sup>



Community impact events allow you to mobilize people to accomplish great works for the Lord. They allow people to be the hands and feet of Jesus, bringing hope and change for people who desperately need it. What could your church do to impact your community this summer?

## Potential Community Impact Events

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**"You never have to recover from a great start. Preventing the summer slump positions you for a great start in the fall."**

Now, for each Community Impact Initiative idea, consider the following thoughts and questions:

**1. Why are we doing this?**

**2. Who will this help?**

**3. How will it help them?**

**4. What do you need to complete this initiative?**

**- People:**

**- Finances:**

**- Organizations:**

**5. When is the best time to launch this initiative?**

**6. How will this initiative "send your people" to be the hands and feet of Jesus?**

## ***Mission Trips***

Mission trips allow you to both engage and send your people! These could be mission trips within your city, to economically challenged areas within the country, or beyond the borders to a foreign country. It is fulfillment of The Great Commission, and it can accomplish so much in very little time. Mission trips allow your congregation to work alongside each other while serving others.

Upon returning from their missions efforts, it is usually obvious to see how the trip challenged people to grow in their relationship with the Lord and with each other. It also breaks their heart for what grieves the Lord, and creates a new urgency in them to serve the least of these, while also fostering gratitude for the provision they've been given in their lives.

## ***Vacation Bible School***

VBS is another dual-purpose way to both engage and send your congregation. Your children are provided an opportunity to learn and grow in their faith without the competition of the normal school calendar. The seeds of the Gospel are planted in their hearts through fun presentations of Bible stories.

It also provides an avenue for children (and their parents) to invite their friends to attend your church during the summer. Done well, VBS can provide much-needed momentum during the middle of summer, and help stop the slump!

# CONCLUSION

How can you send your congregation this summer? Perhaps a better question is, “What would like to see and hear your people talking about at the end of summer?”

Wouldn't it be amazing to hear them talking about how they grew in their walk with the Lord this summer? What would it be like to see giving actually increase this summer? How awesome would it be to see people develop a call into ministry as a result of their missions trip? And most incredible of all, what would it be like to see people place their faith in Jesus Christ this summer as a result of your community impact events?



IT CAN  
HAPPEN!

We have provided a detailed checklist to help you prepare to stop the summer slump. Take a few moments to prepare your plan, and as Solomon shares in Proverbs 21:5, let's all pray it yields profit!

Use the following checklist with your team to **STOP THE SUMMER SLUMP**.

# CHECKLIST

## CHALLENGE the people

1. Money Message	Date:
2. Deliver 90-Day Giving Challenge	Date:
3. Send Weekly Discipleship Emails	Date:
Email Subject Lines:	
▶ #1	Send Date:
▶ #2	Send Date:
▶ #3	Send Date:
▶ #4	Send Date:
▶ #5	Send Date:
▶ #6	Send Date:
▶ #7	Send Date:
▶ #8	Send Date:
▶ #9	Send Date:
▶ #10	Send Date:
▶ #11	Send Date:
▶ #12	Send Date:
▶ #13	Send Date:

## ENGAGE the people

4. Identify EPIC Events for the Summer	
▶ #1	Date:
▶ #2	Date:
▶ #3	Date:
▶ #4	Date:

## SEND the people

5. Identify Community Impact Initiatives	
▶ #1	Date:
▶ #2	Date:
▶ #3	Date:
▶ #4	Date:

## BONUS

Congratulations! You've read all the way to the end of this resource. We wanted to include a bonus to every one who made it to this point.

Here it is: Offer a Fall Kick-Off Event in middle to late August. It allows you to celebrate all the Lord has done and provides an opportunity to cast vision for the Fall. Invite all of your staff, leaders, and congregation to attend this special celebration event where you will have the opportunity to share life-change stories from the summer, cast vision for the future, invite people to be a part of it, and compel them to pray.

Here is a sample agenda to use for your FKO – Fall Kick-Off

1. Celebrate what God did this summer
2. Share stories of life change
3. Provide vision for the future
4. Challenge people to invest and invite
5. Compel them to pray

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## INDEX

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.lifeway.com/Article/pastors-ten-keys-leading-your-church-through-summer>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/diligence?s=t>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/compel?s=t>

<sup>4</sup> <http://wsbt.com/news/local/nappanee-church-and-thousands-providing-food-for-hungry-kids>

<sup>5</sup> <http://willardmaxwell.org/podcast/greetings-in-these-trying-times>

# ABOUT

## COMPLETE STEWARDSHIP

Complete Stewardship is a group of organizations that helps you overcome the challenges of stewardship so you can lead more effectively, your church can grow, and your people can thrive.



CUSTOMIZED  
CAPITAL  
CAMPAIGNS

I WAS BROKE.  
NOW I'M NOT.

HELP PEOPLE  
WIN WITH  
MONEY



INCREASE  
REGULAR  
GIVING

HELPING YOU ACCOMPLISH FAR MORE THAN YOU EVER  
THOUGHT POSSIBLE